

**REVISIONS IN NEED OF REVISING:  
WHAT WENT WRONG IN THE IRAQ WAR**

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**December 2005**

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## FOREWORD

David C. Hendrickson and Robert W. Tucker examine the contentious debate over the Iraq war and occupation, focusing on the critique that the Bush administration squandered an historic opportunity to reconstruct the Iraqi state because of various critical blunders in planning. Though they conclude that critics have made a number of telling points against the Bush administration's conduct of the Iraq war, they argue that the most serious problems facing Iraq and its American occupiers—criminal anarchy and lawlessness, a raging insurgency, and a society divided into rival and antagonistic groups—were virtually inevitable consequences that flowed from the act of war itself. Military and civilian planners were culpable in failing to plan for certain tasks, but the most serious problems had no good solution. The authors draw attention to a variety of lessons, including the danger that the imperatives of “force protection” may sacrifice the broader political mission of U.S. forces and the need for skepticism over the capacity of outsiders to develop the skill and expertise required to reconstruct decapitated states.



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## SUMMARY

The dramatic contrast between expectations and reality in the Iraq war has sparked a wide-ranging debate over “what went wrong.” According to many critics, civilian planners made a series of critical mistakes that have turned what might have been a successful war and occupation into a fiasco. The most common critique takes roughly the following form:

- Though the war plan to topple Saddam was brilliant, planning for the peace was woefully insufficient.
- The United States did not have a sufficient number of troops to restore order in Iraq after the U.S. invasion and also failed to develop a plan to stop the widespread looting that occurred in the immediate aftermath of the fall of Baghdad.
- The administration erred in disbanding the Iraq army, which might have played a valuable role in restoring security to the country.
- The United States erred further in its harsh decrees proscribing members of the Ba’ath party from participation in Iraq’s public life—a decision, like that which disbanded the army, needlessly antagonizing the Sunnis and pushing many of them into the insurgency.
- The Bush administration needlessly antagonized the international community—including both the United Nations and our European allies—and made it much more difficult to obtain help for the occupation and reconstruction of the country.
- The Bush administration was too slow in making funds available for reconstruction and created a labyrinth bureaucracy for the awarding of contracts.

These revisions, the authors argue, are themselves in need of revising. Though the critics have made a number of telling points against the conduct of the war and the occupation, the basic problems faced by the United States flowed from the enterprise

itself, and not primarily from mistakes in execution along the way. The most serious problems facing Iraq and its American occupiers — “endemic violence, a shattered state, a nonfunctioning economy, and a decimated society” — were virtually inevitable consequences that flowed from the breakage of the Iraqi state.

The critique stressing the insufficient number of forces employed in the invasion, though valid abstractly, exaggerates the number and type of forces actually available for the conduct of the war. Once account is taken of the exigencies of a multi-year campaign, the stresses on active and reserve forces created by maintaining troops in the 108,000 to 150,000 range, and the unrealism of assuming significant allied contributions (given the opposition of public opinion to the war in most allied states), it would have been impossible to generate force levels in the 300,000 to 400,000 range called for by many critics.

Plans for “Phase 4” operations, which were given little attention before the war, failed to anticipate the most serious problems facing U.S. forces after the fall of Baghdad — persistent anarchy and the emergence of a raging insurgency. This was a mistake, as critics point out, but it is very doubtful that U.S. forces could have gotten a handle on the problem even had these contingencies received the planning they deserved.

A war plan keyed to the problem of postwar disorder would have inevitably confronted a substantial gap in time between the disintegration of the state and the arrival of forces of sufficient size to establish order. A different plan in all probability could have prevented the worst consequences of the looting, such as the destruction of irreplaceable cultural sites and important government ministries, but the larger consequence of widespread anarchy probably was unavoidable.

It was clearly a mistake to misperceive the size and motives of the insurgency, but it is not so clear that there was a solution to the problem once its scale had been fully appreciated. Most armed opposition was created by the invasion itself and would likely have arisen even had U.S. forces employed milder tactics or employed a different political strategy.

It is very doubtful that the reconstitution of the Iraqi army could have stemmed the immense disorder of occupied Iraq. At best, there

are unanswered questions regarding who might have officered the force, the functions it would have performed, and its political orientation and reliability. Though U.S. forces did not give the training of Iraqi forces the attention it deserved in the first year of occupation, the limited results were due, also, to the artificial character of the national forces the United States sought to build.

Criticisms of the political course followed by the United States—the creation and administration of the Coalition Provisional Authority, persecution of the Baathists, distrust of the Shia (through cancellation of local elections)—all have merit. At the same time, the more fundamental truth is that the United States had thrust itself into the middle of a bitterly divided society, and there was no apparent way to split the difference between groups whose aims were irreconcilable.

Operation IRAQI FREEDOM was in basic respects a test of the theory that civilians must intervene in the military planning process and force their perspectives down the chain of command. Though the record of Iraq war planning does nothing to advance the case for civilian activism, critics also have neglected the larger lesson that there are certain limits to what military power can accomplish. For certain purposes, like the creation of a liberal democratic society that will be a model for others, military power is a blunt instrument, destined by its very nature to give rise to unintended and unwelcome consequences. Rather than “do it better next time,” a better lesson is “don’t do it at all.”

Other lessons are that the military services must digest again the lesson that “war is an instrument of policy.” The profound neglect given to re-establishing order in the military’s prewar planning and the facile assumption that operations critical to the overall success of the campaign were “somebody else’s business” reflect a shallow view of warfare. Military planners should consider the evidence that occupation duties were carried out in a fashion—with the imperatives of “force protection” overriding concern for Iraqi civilian casualties—that risked sacrificing the broader strategic mission of U.S. forces.





## REVISIONS IN NEED OF REVISING: WHAT WENT WRONG IN THE IRAQ WAR

It is already a cliché that much has gone wrong in the American war against Iraq.<sup>1</sup> Two years after the invasion by U.S. and coalition forces, the contrast between what American officials expected would occur, and what in fact did occur, is stark. A telling symbol of that contrast was the deployment of 150,000 U.S. troops in the country on the eve of the January 30, 2005, elections. Before the war, by contrast, Pentagon planners had assumed that U.S. forces might be reduced to as little as 35,000 by the fall of 2003. Before the war, U.S. military officials did not take seriously the prospect that a raging insurgency might face the U.S. occupiers and had assumed that widespread revulsion among Iraqis against Saddam Hussein's rule would translate quickly and effectively into support for a temporary American occupation. In actuality, Iraqi opinion—especially outside the Kurdish community—proved far more hostile to the U.S. occupiers than had been foreseen, such that overwhelming majorities in the Sunni community and a substantial portion of the majority Shia community deemed the United States an “occupying” rather than a “liberating” power. Before the war, administration officials minimized the financial costs of the enterprise, emphasizing that Iraq's oil resources would enable the Iraqis to pay the lion's share of the costs of reconstruction. In truth, the costs of the Iraq occupation have proven to be far greater than had been predicted, with special congressional appropriations amounting to \$192 billion by May 2005, and much more on the way.<sup>2</sup> Even with such large expenditures, precious little reconstruction had actually taken place in Iraq a year-and-a-half into the occupation. Only \$1-2 billion of the \$18 billion authorized for reconstruction by Congress in late 2003 had been expended a year later, and Iraqis had yet to see much tangible improvement in employment or quality of life after a year-and-a-half of occupation. A study by the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, DC, argued that, in every area necessary for a successful reconstruction of Iraq, there had been not only lack of progress but an actual deterioration of conditions on the ground.<sup>3</sup> The best case, according to a Chatham House study in the fall of

2004, was that a new Iraqi government, buttressed by U.S. military power and given a boost by elections in early 2005, would hang on in the face of a continuing insurgency. The worst case was that Iraq was headed toward a breakup of the country and protracted civil war.<sup>4</sup>

The dramatic contrast between the administration's hopes and the reality it confronted has sparked a wide-ranging debate over "what went wrong." According to a legion of critics, the planners of the Bush administration made a series of critical mistakes that have turned what might have been a successful war and occupation into a fiasco. The most common critique takes roughly the following form: though the war plan to topple Saddam was brilliant, planning for the peace was woefully insufficient.<sup>5</sup> The United States did not have a sufficient number of troops to restore order in Iraq after the U.S. invasion and also failed to develop a plan to stop the widespread looting that occurred in the immediate aftermath of the fall of Baghdad. Though the U.S. State Department had conducted a comprehensive study of the problems of occupying Iraq, its conclusions were ignored by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, to the extent that the Director of the State Department study on the future of Iraq, Thomas Warrick, was excluded by the administration from joining Jay Garner's team.<sup>6</sup> The administration erred, according to the critics, in disbanding the Iraq army, which might have played a valuable role in restoring security to the country, and it erred further in its harsh decrees proscribing members of the Ba'ath party from participation in Iraq's public life—a decision, like that which disbanded the army, needlessly antagonizing the Sunnis and pushing many of them into the insurgency. The Bush administration also needlessly antagonized the international community—including both the United Nations (UN) and our European allies—and made it much more difficult to obtain help for the occupation and reconstruction of the country. It was too slow in making funds available for reconstruction and created a labyrinth bureaucracy for awarding contracts.

These views represent the opinions of left-leaning writers and critics; many of them were featured prominently in John Kerry's presidential campaign in 2004. Right-leaning authors have joined in some of this criticism—especially the argument that the United States invaded with too few forces—but their emphasis often has differed. Some argue, for instance, that the many U.S. troubles

stemmed from the fact that the war was conducted in too humane a fashion, such that the enemy never really was defeated. Others argue that the original Pentagon plan for the war called for a rapid transfer of sovereignty to an appointed Iraqi government followed by elections, and that that this plan, which would have stood a much better chance of providing Iraqis with a sense of “ownership” over their own society, was mistakenly shelved and the decision made to install a Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) with a very slow timetable for writing a constitution and holding elections.<sup>7</sup>

These criticisms do not exhaust the litany of errors the Bush administration is said to have committed in the course of the Iraq war, but they represent a broad swath of the criticism that had developed as of late 2004. Underlying them is the conviction—sometimes explicitly voiced, at other times merely implicit—that the administration “squandered an unprecedented opportunity.”<sup>8</sup> Had things been done differently, it is often assumed, the United States would have faced a far more pleasant prospect than it did 2 years after the initial invasion. This criticism has arisen most often from those who supported the invasion and were distressed by how badly the occupation fared, but even critics of the war have often left, if only by implication, the same impression. The problem with U.S. policy in Iraq, in short, lay not in the end chosen but in the means embraced, and had those means been different, the outcome would be different as well.

These revisions, we shall be arguing, are themselves in need of revising. Though the critics on both the left and the right have made a number of telling points against the conduct of the war and the occupation, it is not so clear that different choices on the part of civilian or military officials would have led to a significantly improved outcome. We can see the deleterious consequences flowing from certain of the administration’s decisions, but we can only speculate about what consequences might have followed had a different route been taken. Nevertheless, strong reasons exist for believing that the most serious problems facing Iraq and its American occupiers—“endemic violence, a shattered state, a nonfunctioning economy, and a decimated society”<sup>9</sup>—were virtually inevitable consequences that flowed from the breakage of the Iraqi state. At best, the critics have pointed to policies that, had they been adopted,

would have provided the necessary conditions for a successful war and occupation. Whether they would have been sufficient, however, must be subject to grave doubt.

“Success,” of course, is subject to varying measurements, and it is to be expected that the larger political assessment of the Iraq war will continue to provoke deep divisions. Advocates of the war, whose shaken optimism recovered with the November 2004 offensive against Fallujah and the January 2005 elections, are likely to remain advocates even if political and economic reconstruction remains elusive. However bad it gets, the answer is ready that something much worse lay in prospect had Saddam Hussein been left in power. Opponents of the war, who insisted that containment and deterrence were workable policies that need not have been displaced by preventive war, will continue to deplore the war as causing great and unnecessary dangers, but now must deal with the new reality created by the American occupation—above all, the disastrous strategic implications of an Iraq that dissolves into warring statelets or remains an economic wasteland.

The larger argument that rages, and that will continue to rage, over the justification of the Iraq war is not our concern in this monograph. Here we want to focus on the decisions made in the initial year of the intervention and ask whether they were those best calculated to achieve the results the administration wished to achieve—the creation of a secure, liberal, and democratic Iraq. The exercise is not entirely an academic one. Like the long argument that arose over the Vietnam War, the lessons drawn from the Iraq experience will unavoidably exert a profound influence over force structures, war strategies, and public attitudes for a long time.<sup>10</sup>

## **Obstacles to a Successful Reconstruction.**

Three great problems have emerged since the fall of Saddam’s statues in April 2003: criminal anarchy, a protracted insurgency, and a society deeply divided on ethnic and sectarian lines. Each of these has ramifications for the ability of the occupying power to provide security. “If you don’t master security,” noted one observer, everything else “gets washed away like sand castles on the beach.”<sup>11</sup> It is, as it were, the *sine qua non* of economic reconstruction, political

rehabilitation, and the fostering of a new civil society.<sup>12</sup> If we are to think clearly about the “might have beens” of the Iraq war, these three factors, and the bearing they have on the provision of security, are clearly of crucial significance. If the critical accounts of the planning and implementation of the Iraq war are to be accepted, it must be shown that a different course of action would have dealt in a satisfactory fashion with these formidable obstacles.

The widespread looting that occurred after U.S. forces raided Baghdad and toppled Saddam’s statues on April 9, 2003, symbolized the problem of criminal lawlessness and anarchy that has pervaded Iraq since the regime’s collapse. By the time it had run its course (after which there was little left to loot), virtually no industrial plant, government ministry, or cultural institution was left intact. Over the course of the following months, a spasm of car-jackings, kidnappings, and murders emerged that added to the sense of a society under siege. Saddam, as one columnist put it, had not been replaced by Bremer but by Hobbes — the state of nature in which life was “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” This widespread criminal anarchy dug a hole from which the occupiers have found it very difficult to emerge. It not only made the challenge of reconstruction immensely more difficult, but made freedom seem indistinguishable, in the Iraqi mind, from anarchy. By demonstrating that coalition forces could not control the basics of security, the persistence of anarchy undoubtedly gave a significant fillip to the resistance.<sup>13</sup>

The second obstacle to a satisfactory reconstruction has been the emergence of a protracted guerrilla and terrorist insurgency, which American planners also failed to anticipate. “What we were really hoping,” commented one U.S. commander, “was to just go through, and everyone would wave flags and stuff.”<sup>14</sup> It is now clear that the insurgency enjoys advantages on its own terrain that are just as formidable as the precision-guided weaponry deployed with devastating effect by the United States. Because U.S. forces can destroy everything they can see, they had no difficulty in marching into Baghdad and forcing the resistance underground. Once underground, however, the resistance acquired a set of advantages that have proved to be just as effective as America’s formidable firepower. Iraq’s military forces had no answer to smart bombs, but

the United States has no answer—at least no good answer—to car bombs. Iraq’s military forces were powerless to resist America’s overwhelming dominance in the air, but, by the same token, America finds it very difficult to guard against insurgents able to strike unprotected targets. American losses are painful and unexpected, but the key strategic vulnerability does not consist of the 1,706 dead and 12,855 wounded American soldiers.<sup>15</sup> It has consisted instead of the insurgents’ capability to sow such conditions of fear and insecurity as to make extremely difficult the various tasks required for the reconstruction of the Iraqi state and the rehabilitation of its economy. The American invaders and the Iraqi resisters have both, in their different ways, confirmed the old adage that it is far easier to destroy than to create. For the side for whom “not losing” is the key imperative, that circumstance makes for a profound advantage; for the side that must win, as the occupying power must, it is a profound and perhaps fatal handicap.<sup>16</sup>

The third important obstacle to the success of the American effort is that Iraq is a profoundly divided society. Ruled historically by the Sunni minority who comprise approximately 20 percent of the population, Iraq also contains a minority of Kurds in the northern part of the country and a majority Shia population (estimates range from 55 to 65 percent) whose base of power is in the south, but who are to be found also in Baghdad and points north. The existence of these historic divisions has made problematic any reconstruction of the Iraq government. Any solution that gave power or significant advantage to one of these groups at the expense of another immediately raised the prospect of civil violence. Over the course of the past 2 years, significant factions within each of these groups have threatened noncooperation or violence if their vital interests were not safeguarded. The Kurds, for example, threatened secession from Iraq unless they gained control of Kirkuk, a city they consider to be theirs but from which they were driven by Saddam Hussein’s “Arabization” campaigns.<sup>17</sup> Most Shia, by contrast, tolerated the American occupation, but only on the condition that the United States was seen to be moving rapidly toward democratic elections that would give them power. The Sunnis, who have been the biggest losers of the U.S. invasion and were the ethnic base of Saddam Hussein’s regime, provided the largest number of fighters for the insurgency.

These are clearly formidable obstacles; any one, by itself, would have posed fundamental problems for the occupying force. Together, they have made for an extremely difficult situation. Clearly, it has been the parlous security situation that has made economic reconstruction go so slowly. This program was undoubtedly misconceived in the exclusive role given to American primary contractors (required by Congress) for expenditures in Iraq, but misgivings over its character have been greatly heightened by the bad security situation and the need to divert funds from civilian infrastructure to protective forces.<sup>18</sup> So, too, projects for building civil society could barely get off the ground when participants feared for their lives. The insurgency, as one observer noted, “sucked the oxygen out of the liberal experiment,” with large numbers of Iraqi liberals having “taken refuge behind barbed-wire gates, fled the country, gone broke, or been murdered.”<sup>19</sup>

Given the vital importance of providing security for the reconstruction of Iraq, and the fatal role that insecurity has played in making progress in every other sector highly problematic, it is remarkable that neither the problem of acute anarchy nor that of a raging insurgency were anticipated by American war planners before hostilities commenced. Though there was a plan for “Phase 4” (post-combat) operations that anticipated the potential for large numbers of refugees and the possible destruction of Iraqi oil facilities, the plan did not foresee what turned out to be the most serious dangers confronting the occupation.<sup>20</sup> In one sense, of course, these failures amount to a kind of directed verdict against the civilian and military war planners. It is only a kind of verbal legerdemain that allows observers to say that the war plan was superb and the peace plan was a bust. The United States has been at war in Iraq since March 2003; it cried “peace” when there was no peace; victory when there was no victory.

### **The Numbers Game.**

One persistent criticism is that the invasion was mounted with altogether insufficient U.S. forces. The Bush administration, writes Larry Diamond, “was never willing to commit anything like the forces necessary to ensure order in postwar Iraq.” Diamond believes



that “around 300,000 troops might have been enough to make Iraq largely secure after the war,” but also insists that “different kinds of troops, with different rules of engagement,” were needed, including “vastly more military police and other troops trained for urban patrols, crowd control, civil reconstruction, and peace maintenance and enforcement.”<sup>21</sup> Others have put the numbers needed much higher. According to one study, the same ratio of peacekeepers to population as in Kosovo would generate a force requirement of 480,000 troops for Iraq; if Bosnia were the model, 364,000 would be required.<sup>22</sup> James Fallows, in his incisive critique of American war planning, notes that the original military plan (prepared in the 1990s by then U.S. Central Command [CENTCOM] commander Anthony Zinni and later updated) called for an invasion force of 400,000. Over time, in response to the persistent objections of Secretary Rumsfeld, it was pared back so that only some 200,000 forces were in theater at the time of the Iraq invasion. Of these, less than half were actually in Iraq itself when Baghdad fell as a consequence of the “rolling start” to the operation. One division, scheduled to invade Iraq from Turkish territory, had been refused admittance by the Turks and was in transit to Kuwaiti ports; most remaining forces were marshaling in Kuwait.<sup>23</sup>

That additional U.S. forces would have been useful can scarcely be denied. Iraq’s borders were left unguarded for a year, according to Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, and clearly more might have been done on that score. Also, a large number of ammunition dumps across the country were left unguarded for months, including critical facilities like the al-Qaqaa one south of Baghdad. U.S. forces were clearly short-handed in dealing with the anarchical conditions in Iraq. Even when looters were arrested, there was no place to put them and no way to process them, and they were simply released.<sup>24</sup> The large number of Iraqis swept up into the U.S.-managed prison system – approaching some 40,000 in the first year alone, of whom about 9/10ths were not part of the insurgency – were processed by U.S. forces that were “overworked, overwhelmed, and under-resourced.”<sup>25</sup>

But two large qualifications to the critique stressing insufficient U.S. forces committed to Iraq must be made. The first is that the United States did not actually have in possession the requisite numbers of

the “different kinds of troops” that critics, not unreasonably, insist ought to have been sent. Second, and more seriously, a much larger force at the beginning would have substantially decreased the ability of the United States to maintain higher force levels over the course of the occupation. Indeed, experience from spring 2003 to fall 2004 indicates that ground forces were stretched extremely thin by the pressures of maintaining a force in the 108,000-150,000 range, to say nothing of the 300,000-500,000 that critics have called for, with unsustainable reliance on National Guard and Reserve units and a “broken” mobilization system. A large number of American troops at the beginning would only have been possible if there had been a rapid drawdown by fall 2003. Once the problem is seen as one of maintaining a force over a protracted period (say, 3 to 5 years), there is simply no way to generate those large numbers within existing force constraints. It might be argued, of course, that had the initial invasion force been 300,000-400,000 troops, the later problems confronting the occupiers would have been substantially reduced,<sup>26</sup> but this is unlikely. Even if considered probable, it would still have been a big risk. Military planners were just as blind as civilians in the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) to these factors. They, too, assumed it would be a “quickie,” a glorious one-night-stand from which an uncomplicated withdrawal would be possible. Very few to none were thinking in terms of the protracted commitment that now seems all but inevitable.<sup>27</sup>

One way of solving this problem was to obtain sizeable contributions from allied nations. This was, in fact, part of the Pentagon’s prewar plan. It called for four divisions (one from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO], one from Great Britain, one led by Polish forces, and one from the Arab Emirates) to replace withdrawn U.S. forces. It was modeled, that is to say, on the previous multilateral experience of the 1990s in which the Americans “made the meal,” and NATO and UN forces “did the dishes.” As it happened, however, only the British and Polish-led divisions materialized. The failure to gain additional international support was a criticism often directed against the Bush administration by domestic critics. The absence of UN authorization is one part of this indictment, but another part is that 90 percent of the casualties and

the cost of the war has fallen on American shoulders. John Kerry in particular made this a central part of his campaign against Bush in the 2004 presidential elections, but calls to increase the international character of the foreign presence in Iraq have been part of the litany of criticisms from the beginning. "We've got a real problem because it's an American face as the occupier," argued Democratic senator Bill Nelson of Florida. "The anger and frustration of Iraqis could have been avoided had it been the world community occupying Iraq and stabilizing it instead of us."<sup>28</sup>

This critique, however, is more properly focused on the decision to go to war in the first place rather than on the failure to gain much allied support in the aftermath. Public opinion in allied countries that might provide support was unconvinced by the three rationales the Bush administration offered for the Iraq war—that war was necessary to enforce UN resolutions calling for Iraq's disarmament; that war, in any event, was justified to deprive Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction (WMD); and that war, finally, was imperative to free the Iraqi people from the grip of a cruel tyrant.<sup>29</sup> Instead, solid majorities in most allied countries found U.S. actions to partake of some mixture of the illegal, immoral, and imprudent.<sup>30</sup> Because the nations that might have provided outside support were mostly democracies, public opinion inevitably constrained their ability to offer troops. Even sharp opponents, however, did not actively obstruct U.S. actions. The UN Security Council in May 2003 recognized the United States as the occupying power and subsequently the council and the secretariat contributed constructively, under the mediation of Lakhdar Brahimi, to the formation of the interim Iraqi government and a plan for nationwide elections. (Recall that influential Shia leader Ayatollah Ali Sistani refused to meet with Bremer, and they never exchanged so much as a bow.)

The UN's formal acceptance of the occupation, however, did not have a transformative effect on Iraqi opinion, and it is doubtful that even a larger UN presence would have done so. The tragic loss of the UN mission under Sergio de Mello in August 2003 made it clear that terrorists and insurgents would target any group cooperating with the U.S. mission in the country. This, in turn, meant that the call for additional foreign forces under a UN banner was made in

circumstances in which there would be real danger. The traditional model of UN peacekeeping assumes that there is a peace to be kept, and that UN workers can go about their mission of state-building without extreme peril. These were not the conditions of post-invasion Iraq. The 30 UN officials in Iraq who worked on the organization of the January 2005 elections were themselves largely confined to the Green Zone, and the unions representing UN workers warned Secretary General Kofi Annan against sending them to areas where their lives would be imperiled.<sup>31</sup>

The situation with respect to UN workers also pertains to the prospect of significant forces from other countries. The Governing Council appointed by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) made it clear that it wanted no soldiers from states bordering Iraq, and vetoed a Turkish offer to send forces. Though the Bush administration did get a UN Security Council resolution passed calling on member states to aid in the reconstruction effort, contributions from other states were mostly symbolic and well below prewar expectations.<sup>32</sup> Given the overwhelming unpopularity of the war in the countries most often mentioned as likely providers of outside forces—France, Germany, India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan—the odds that more adroit diplomacy could have succeeded in eliciting this effort seem not too great.

Once one dismisses the prospects of significant allied contributions—which followed from the unilateral character of the war—and once one takes into account the need to plan for a protracted instead of a one-time deployment of U.S. soldiers, the numbers question appears dramatically different. Critics stressing the need for much larger U.S. forces have not taken these factors into account. There were real constraints on the numbers available to prosecute the war.

## **Avoiding Anarchy.**

Of all the missteps of the U.S. invasion, surely the most important was the failure to stop or deal seriously with the widespread looting and anarchy that enveloped Iraq, and most especially Baghdad, in the days and weeks following the collapse of the Iraqi regime.

Despite attempts to downplay the scale of the disaster by Secretary Rumsfeld—freedom, he said, is “untidy”—the episode clearly had extremely prejudicial effects on the prospects for a successful occupation. That it would have been desirable to prevent this is very nearly self-evident, but it is not clear whether it would have been possible, even had the will been present and had the contingency received the planning it deserved.

The reasons for the lack of preparedness in dealing with budding anarchy and lawlessness are complex. Some evidence indeed suggests that American officials in the first few days made no attempt to stop the looting because they believed that the mob would direct its anger at the symbols of the old regime and take revenge on the same people that U.S. forces were themselves pursuing. Commented one Iraqi political scientist educated at Princeton:

I believe the United States has committed an act of irresponsibility with few parallels in history, with the looting of the National Museum, the National Library, and so many of the ministries. People are saying that the United States wanted this—that it allowed all this to happen because it wanted the symbolism of ordinary Iraqis attacking every last token of Saddam Hussein’s power.<sup>33</sup>

This is an exaggeration, but one that nevertheless contains a degree of truth. The United States did not want the destruction of the National Library and other cultural treasures, but it did want the symbolism of ordinary Iraqis striking the Ba’athists. It just got much more than it bargained for, and by the time it realized that what was happening was fundamentally prejudicial to American interests in ensuring a successful reconstruction, much of the damage had been done.<sup>34</sup>

The failure to deal with the looters had further causes. Warnings from outside observers that anarchy would be a real and formidable danger after the regime fell were not reflected in the orders given to American units participating in the fall of Baghdad. The units of the Third Infantry Division (Mechanized) that took the city had no orders for “Phase 4” operations and were forced to improvise on the spot.<sup>35</sup> Though the administration was warned previous to the war that certain cultural institutions like the National Museum would be endangered, the scale of the looting came as a great surprise

to American officials and to many Iraqis themselves, who were shocked at the criminality that “freedom” unleashed.<sup>36</sup> The toppling of Saddam’s statues did not signal the end of Iraqi resistance, which moved underground but continued to attack U.S. forces, and this made it difficult to transition to “peace and stability operations.” Over and above these considerations was the belief that the peacekeeping and stability tasks needed after the invasion were “someone else’s mission,” not in keeping with Army’s warrior ethos.<sup>37</sup>

On the basis of these considerations, it is not difficult to establish a certain culpability on the part of U.S. forces in failing to contend with the wholesale criminality and anarchy unleashed in Iraq. Nor can this culpability be assigned simply to Secretary Rumsfeld and OSD. Had the need for peacekeeping and law-enforcement capabilities been behind the military’s preference for a larger invasion force,<sup>38</sup> it would have been reflected in the orders issued to the units that took Baghdad, and there is no evidence that it was. What is misleading about this interpretation is not the contention that CENTCOM *ought* to have had a well-developed plan to deal with the looting, but the assumption that it would have successfully mastered the problem had it done so. This seems implausible. The criticism too readily assumes that if problems are foreseen, there must in principle be a solution to them. In all probability, however, a war plan keyed to the problem of postwar disorder itself would have inevitably confronted a substantial gap in time between the disintegration of the state and the arrival of forces of sufficient size to establish order, creating a window of opportunity for looting that even a far-sighted plan could not have closed. There is, moreover, substantial evidence that some of the destruction was carried out by Iraqi intelligence agents and could not have been guarded against, even had a determined effort been made to do so.<sup>39</sup> That the deliberate fostering of anarchy was part of Saddam’s plan is also suggested by his release of some 100,000 criminals from Iraqi prisons several months before the invasion. Nor was the anarchy confined to Baghdad: looters arose from Mosul in the north to Basra in the south and attacked an astonishing array of targets across the country. A different plan could in all probability have prevented the worst consequences of the looting, such as the destruction of irreplaceable cultural sites and important government

ministries, but it is difficult to see how the larger consequence of widespread anarchy, with all its implications for the success of the American mission, could have been avoided. In large measure, this consequence flowed directly from the breakage of the Iraqi state.

Seen in broadest perspective, the breaking of the state in effect destroyed Iraq's immune system, making it vulnerable to a host of ailments. Among these were criminal anarchy, the ease with which foreign terrorists set up shop on Iraqi territory, widespread access to arms, and a protracted insurgency. These consequences followed from the act of war itself. They may have been mitigated by a fundamentally different war plan, but they were likely to ensue even if military plans had been informed by greater foresight and better calculated to meet the dangers presented.

### **The Emergence of the Insurgency.**

Reflecting on the emergence of a protracted insurgency, some American military officials and outside observers have concluded that the United States was "too gracious" in its victory.<sup>40</sup> President Bush himself has spoken of a "catastrophic success," by which he meant to say that the Ba'athist regime had not really been defeated during the phase of "major combat operations." Sometimes this is attributed to the inability to secure Turkish approval for launching part of the U.S. attack from the north, from which it might have swept through the Sunni Triangle region northwest of Baghdad and dealt summarily with Ba'athist resisters. Whatever the case, there is little question that the phase of major combat operations did not really defeat the regime. Before the war, the U.S. military had expected a formal surrender from units that would remain intact; instead, Iraqi military units simply dissolved. Many soldiers just went home, relieved that their service was at an end. Many others, it is apparent, faded underground with the intention of continuing resistance.

Because those Iraqi forces willing to continue the fight against the United States were not defeated, it is often assumed that U.S. forces might have followed a strategy that *could* have defeated them. Like the strategy for dealing with anarchy, however, this, too, is implausible. The Iraqi insurgents were not somehow obliged to

present themselves in such a fashion as to be destroyed by precision-guided U.S. firepower. Indeed, one could argue that Saddam Hussein played far more into the hands of the United States than was advisable. In attempting a futile defense of Baghdad, he moved many units into positions that were easily detectable by U.S. reconnaissance and just as easily destroyed. His logical strategy from the beginning was never to confront the U.S. military with massed forces, for in such a fight his troops were certain to be annihilated, but to save them for the coming resistance.<sup>41</sup> This, too, casts an interesting light on “one of the most brilliant invasion successes in modern military history,”<sup>42</sup> for what the attackers aimed at – the dissolution of formal resistance by Iraqi main force units – was the very thing it was in the interest of the defender to accept. What the attackers did not think of – the emergence of a guerrilla insurgency that would seek to make reconstruction impossible – was, by contrast, the very thing that it was most likely the defender would adopt.<sup>43</sup>

It is clear, in any event, that the insurgents have proved themselves far more cunning and determined than initial estimates predicted. The insurgency also has enjoyed a number of advantages stemming from its superior knowledge of the terrain – a “home-field advantage” that is far more significant in guerrilla war than in competitive sports. In the first place, the insurgency enjoyed widespread access to arms and explosives. Given the ubiquity of such materials in Iraq, it was probably impossible to reduce seriously the insurgents’ access to them, even if a determined effort had been made to guard the arms depots. Second, the capacity of the insurgents to strike from unexpected directions inevitably made U.S. forces suspicious of any approaching Iraqi. It has sometimes been argued that the isolation of the occupying forces, whether in the U.S.-controlled Green Zone in Baghdad or in armed patrols throughout the country, worked strongly against gaining the trust of the population, but this was a consequence forced on the occupiers by the insurgency. It is not clear that anything could have been done about it, save at the risk of much greater casualties for U.S. forces or administrators. Perhaps the key advantage enjoyed by the insurgents was the capability of putting U.S. forces in situations where the military response would further antagonize the population and make any contact with them a source of profound danger.



The vulnerabilities that events have disclosed have included the assassination of Iraqis working with U.S. forces in any capacity, whether as translators, police, or soldiers, together with the threats made against their families; attacks on oil facilities and other vital infrastructure projects; strikes against the country's transportation arteries, making safe travel and logistical resupply extremely problematic; the incessant attacks on patrolling U.S. forces; and the kidnapping or killing of workers for nongovernment organizations (NGOs) and commercial enterprises needed to rebuild Iraq's infrastructure.

Guerrillas classically are able to place occupying forces in situations where they are "damned if they do and damned if they don't." U.S. forces made determined efforts to root out the insurgency, but these measures had the effect of increasing hostility toward them in the broader population. Insurgents setting off roadside bombs sometimes attacked U.S. forces responding to the disaster, so U.S. forces frequently adopted the tactic of spraying fire rather indiscriminately once they were attacked – an expedient that did not endear them to the local population.<sup>44</sup> So, too, one of the most alarming and depressing features of even the most egregious terrorist attacks against civilian targets has been locals on the scene screaming their hatred at the United States and holding U.S. forces responsible.

It seems apparent that the insurgency could not have enjoyed the success it has without support from the local population. American officials repeatedly characterized the insurgents as die-hard Ba'athists or foreign terrorists; it is now understood that there are multiple groups with varying agendas.<sup>45</sup> U.S. officials also minimized the overall number of insurgents throughout the first year after the fall of Baghdad, usually placing the size of the insurgency at from 2,000 to 5,000 men. By fall 2004, unofficial estimates from American military officers put the number at 20,000; a British general in the south put it at 50,000; one U.S. intelligence analyst placed it, conservatively, at 100,000 among Sunnis alone.<sup>46</sup> With opinion polls in spring 2004 showing some 50 percent of Iraqis expressing the belief that attacks on occupying forces were morally justified in some instances, the number of sympathizers was certainly in the millions. Whatever the

true number of insurgents, there seems little doubt that U.S. forces fell into the trap of believing their own propaganda – failing in particular to understand that most insurgents were probably motivated by a nationalistic or religious revulsion against the invader or feelings of revenge for a wrong done a kinsman rather than by attachment to Saddam or al-Qaeda. It was clearly a mistake to misperceive the size and motives of the insurgency, but it is not so clear that there was a solution to the problem once its scale had been fully appreciated.

The most critical weakness of the U.S. forces was the absence of good intelligence. One Army officer on patrol in the Sunni triangle noted that 90 percent of the information fed to his unit by Iraqi informers turned out to be bogus. It was the imperative of gaining better intelligence with respect to the sources and composition of the resistance that led directly to the Abu Ghraib scandal, perhaps the most dramatic instance of how a response to an insurgency may itself compound an occupying force's alienation from the population. But this alienation also followed from the incessant raids that U.S. forces conducted against suspected insurgents. The humiliation of seeing one's door broken down, the male inhabitants tied up, houses and apartments ransacked for weapons, female undergarments scattered about, was such that these tactics could only increase the numbers of those willing to join the insurgency.<sup>47</sup> The same is true of the vast number of persons who passed into the U.S. prison system in Iraq. At the same time, it is not clear that a far less aggressive approach would have worked. It may well be true that various U.S. practices have made the insurgency larger and more determined than it would otherwise have been, but it is also highly probable that for a substantial core of fighters, the willingness to resist the occupation through force arose in the first instance from an alien invasion and could not have been avoided through milder tactics.

The existence of these dilemmas, and the unhappy choices they disclosed, were revealed in the confrontation between U.S. forces and insurgents in Fallujah after four American contractors were slain in April 2004. While public attention and criticism focused on the inconsistency of ordering a large attack and then calling it off after a massive outcry of Iraqi public opinion, the more basic point is that this inconsistent conduct arose out of the extremely disagreeable alternative that was presented. The same was true of

the confrontation that ensued throughout southern Iraq after U.S. forces closed the newspaper of Moqtada al Sadr and attempted to arrest him, prompting widespread attacks from his followers from Baghdad to Basra. The U.S. objective of killing or capturing Sadr was abandoned in April, as it was in August, after the intervention of Ayatollah Sistani. Given the inconsistent conduct of U.S. forces in both instances, whereby they ultimately accepted what they had previously declared unacceptable, it would be difficult to defend the overall record, one of vacillation and inconstancy.<sup>48</sup> But the record does underline the critical point: U.S. forces frequently found themselves in situations where they, not unreasonably, felt compelled to respond to provocation, but where the response imposed extreme political costs. The Fallujah operation after the November 2004 U.S. presidential election had the signal advantage of destroying many car-bomb factories, but it also drove 300,000 Sunnis from their homes and completely devastated the city.

The problems flowing from bad intelligence seem virtually endemic to the situation American forces confronted in Iraq. They were strangers in a strange land. They lacked the linguistic and cultural skills that might have defused misunderstandings, and, even had these been possessed in greater numbers, they would, as foreigners, have inevitably excited the suspicion and fear of the population they were garrisoning. These difficulties, moreover, would have existed even if American forces had been much larger in size. The assumption that the United States would have won the hearts and minds of the population had it maintained occupying forces of 300,000 as opposed to 140,000 must seem dubious in the extreme. Certain things could have done it better, like protecting critical infrastructure, securing arms depots, guarding borders, or processing prisoners, but the larger force would also have enabled the United States to do more things that would have inflamed rather than quelled the insurgency.

### **Abolishing the Iraqi Army and Proscribing the Ba'athists.**

A persistent criticism of the Bush administration's conduct of the Iraq war has focused on the political maladroitness with which it handled the Iraqis. The initial plan was for a rapid transfer of

sovereignty to an indigenous Iraqi authority, probably headed by Ahmed Chalabi. It also assumed that the Iraqi army, shorn of its Ba'athist officers, would remain in existence. In the confusion and mayhem of post-liberation Iraq, however, the administration soon decided to install Paul Bremer as the pro-consul of the country and to shelve plans for a rapid transfer of sovereignty. One of the first acts of the CPA was to disband the Iraqi army, a measure complemented by a far-reaching proscription of the Ba'athists. Both measures elicited a great deal of criticism.

Unlike the various classes of Republican Guards or the irregular *fedeyeen* forces, say the critics, the army was a national institution. Several studies before the war—from the U.S. Army War College and the Council on Foreign Relations, among others—argued that an attempt should be made to negotiate with Iraqi units and use them as a force for maintaining order.<sup>49</sup> In any event, however, the army simply disintegrated; bases were stripped bare by looters and rendered effectively unusable. The situation that confronted the CPA and Bremer was not that anticipated by any of the prewar studies. Like any other body whose head has been decapitated, this conscripted and ill-paid force (whose privates received the equivalent of \$2 a month) was unlikely to be reconstituted without major surgery.<sup>50</sup>

However much the reconstitution of the Iraqi army might appear as a kind of *deus ex machina* to stem the immense disorder of occupied Iraq, it is doubtful whether it could have done so. At best, we have a series of unanswered questions regarding who might have officered the force, the functions it would have performed, and its political orientation and reliability.<sup>51</sup> Because it simply dissolved in the course of major combat operations, it would have been useless to stem the first tide of anarchy and looting. Though often described as “highly trained,” it was not trained for the policing and peacekeeping tasks most urgently needed in the new Iraq. It is now regularly said that the program to train Iraqi police, national guard, and army forces has been beset by incompetence and mismanagement, and undoubtedly the United States did not give this task the high-level attention it deserved, farming it out in the first instance to private contractors.<sup>52</sup> These limited results, however, may simply reflect the profound difficulties in seeking to train Iraqis to serve a foreign master. In

effect, the CPA ruled out using the various militias, such as the “Badr Brigades” of the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), holding that the existence of these militias was a threat to the integrity of the Iraqi state. However reasonable the fear of fractionalization and civil war that lay behind this attitude, it also underlined the artificial character of the national forces the United States sought to build, and could not but foster the suspicion among recruits that they were being asked to fight for objectives not their own. Until fall 2004, when a handful of Iraqi units—largely of Kurdish and Shia composition—began participating in American operations, the uniform record was the unreliability of all classes of Iraqi forces—police, national guard, army. There is no reason for thinking that the same difficulty would not have arisen with respect to a reconstituted Iraqi army, and the inauspicious results from the creation of the “Fallujah brigade” after the retreat of American forces from the city in April 2004 provides telling evidence on this score. It is, in any case, difficult to think of a preceding case in which an invader sought to rely upon the army it defeated for the maintenance of order, and one should not exclude the possibility that U.S. forces would have been providing arms and equipment to forces thoroughly infiltrated by the insurgency.

These reflections are not inconsistent with the view that the manner in which the disbanding of the army took place was a mistake. Bremer initially disbanded the force without pay and later felt compelled to rescind that decision so as to stifle the anger it caused. Certainly there was nothing to be gained from any measure smacking of a gratuitous humiliation, but that does not mean that a reconstituted army would have acted as a loyal servant of the occupation. Given the U.S. experience with forces that have been vetted and trained, this seems altogether unlikely.

A broader question may be raised with respect to the political strategy that the CPA followed during its brief existence. If there was a simple formula by which a coherent political strategy may be expressed, it was to communicate to the Shia that they would, as the majority group, quickly gain power through free elections; to reassure the Sunni that, despite losing their historic dominance over Iraq, they would not be subject to persecution; and to persuade the

Kurds to cooperate in the maintenance of the Iraqi state and to rest content with an autonomous status short of independence. In fact, the American occupiers did not consistently pursue any such logic. The proscription of the Ba'athists, many of whom had joined the party as a condition of employment, was inconsistent with this strategy and was partially reversed when the Allawi interim government took power in summer 2004. The Ba'athist proscription, together with the incessant raids in the Sunni triangle, virtually eliminated the prospect of reconciling the Sunnis to the new order. At the same time, the CPA took some measures that also seriously disaffected the Shia. The most important (and least defensible) of these steps was the cancellation of local elections, a measure taken because it was thought that the best organized forces would be the Islamist parties.<sup>53</sup> The CPA also adopted a seven-step constitutional process whereby free elections would only take place at the end of a 2-year process drawing up a new constitution. Opposing a quick transfer of sovereignty to the Iraqis, Bremer told a congressional committee in August 2003 that:

No appointed government, not even one as honest and dedicated as the Iraqi Governing Council, can have the legitimacy necessary today to take on the difficult issues Iraqis face as they write their constitution and elect a government. The only path to full Iraqi sovereignty is through a written constitution, ratified and followed by free, democratic elections.<sup>54</sup>

The CPA seemed to communicate, by its opposition to any immediate elections, a distrust of the likely political leadership the Shia would produce.

Since the Americans, under duress from Sistani, ultimately reversed themselves on the question of transferring sovereignty to a UN-appointed interim government and also speeded up the electoral calendar they originally had envisioned, it seems difficult to defend the United States against the charge that it was doing in fall 2004 what it ought to have been doing the year previously – namely, playing a supporting role to an appointed but sovereign Iraqi government that enjoyed international recognition and was moving as rapidly as possible to nationwide elections. It is useful to remember, however, that the original rationale of the CPA, in

wishing to delay the transfer of sovereignty until elections were held under a new constitution, was that an appointed government would lack legitimacy. Having changed its mind in the interim, the U.S. Government subsequently spoke in an entirely different vein, but its original skepticism was true enough. The Allawi government enjoyed greater legitimacy than the CPA, but that is not to say that it really possessed legitimacy itself. On the contrary, it was profoundly handicapped, as any such government would be, by the circumstance that it could not stand without U.S. assistance but its dependence on such assistance compromised its nationalist credentials in the eyes of the Iraqi public.

In detail, these criticisms of the U.S. course—that it needlessly persecuted the Ba’athists, that it sowed suspicion among the Shia, and that it flaunted rather than sought to minimize its leading role in the occupation, even as against its own appointed Governing Council—all have merit. At the same time, the more fundamental truth is that the United States had thrust itself into the middle of a bitterly divided society. To find a successful political strategy in these circumstances required the skill of an equilibrist and a substantial amount of sheer good luck; even then, it may simply have been impossible. The proscription of Ba’athists undoubtedly appeared as unnecessarily punitive to the Sunni, but to the Shia and the Kurds, it was justice delayed but not denied. That is why Ahmed Chalabi, angling for a leading position among the Shia, was in favor of that step. Nor should we exaggerate the significance of the Ba’athist proscription in fostering ill-will among the Sunni toward the U.S. occupation. There was plenty of that created by the invasion itself, by the dislodgment of Sunni elites that it implied, and by the measures pursued to track down Ba’athists and to battle the insurgency. It was a perfectly defensible piece of constitutional engineering that the Kurds were in effect allotted a veto over any new constitution, but the Shia did not accept the justice of this provision of the Transitional Administrative Law (TAL) and pointed out, in terms almost Lincolnesque, that no majority could consent to being ruled indefinitely by a minority.<sup>55</sup> Ultimately, the problem was that there was no apparent way to split the difference between groups whose aims were, in the final analysis, irreconcilable.

These considerations do not support the conclusion that the course chosen by the United States was inevitable or that the insurgency had to take the form that it did. Had the United States pursued a different course—narrowing to a small group the number of Ba’athists who would be proscribed; seeking to rejuvenate the old institutions of the Iraqi state, especially the army; encouraging rather than canceling local elections; moving speedily toward the appointment, with the UN’s blessing, of an interim but sovereign government—a different set of consequences from those actually experienced might well have occurred. Though such a course was unlikely, given the overall character of the war, the more endemic problem is that measures friendly to the Sunni would have caused serious trouble within the Shia communities whose cooperation was indispensable for the success of the American effort. For an indeterminate but probably substantial number of insurgents (certainly the foreign jihadists and also many of the Salafist and Wahabi Sunnis), for whom the infidel invasion was itself the most serious sin, it is doubtful that their determination to resist by arms the U.S. occupation would have been altered by these measures. At most such measures would have made it more difficult for this class of insurgents to find refuge and support in Sunni areas of the country, but some of these steps would also have increased the likelihood of a Shia insurgency. Indeed, if more conciliatory gestures toward the Sunni had been paired with aggressive moves to disarm the Shia militias, the dangers of a Shia insurgency would have been very considerably enhanced. Splitting the difference between rival groups is a logical strategy in politics accustomed to resolving conflicts through tolerance, negotiation, compromise, and restraint, but where irreconcilable demands exist, the result of this method may simply be to alienate both sides.<sup>56</sup>

The January 2005 elections did not overcome these various schisms. The elections were important because they provided the Shia with a sense of political ownership that dulls, for them, the sharp edges of the American occupation. In addition, the new government, even if hobbled by division and threats of breakdown, seems likely to provide a boost to organizing Shia military power. But though the election results will enable the Shia to fight a civil war with the Sunni more effectively (with the Kurds potentially in mortal conflict with one or both of the others), the election does not ward



off the prospect of continuing and endemic violence. That requires a political settlement whose formula still seems elusive. The elections were not considered legitimate by the Sunni, who by and large did not participate and who seem unlikely to submit to their effective disenfranchisement. The confrontation in the North between Kurds, who wish to control Kirkuk, and the Arabs and Turkmen, who wish to see it under the control of the Iraqi state, has been delayed by the Kurds' desire not to offend the United States, but it remains likely that ultimately the conflict, pitting irreconcilable claims against one another, will be resolved by arms. Much as we must hope that an Iraqi leader will emerge with the wisdom to reconcile these contradictory aspirations, the historical record is not auspicious. In ethnically heterogeneous countries, democratization has often been followed by secession and civil war. In the depressing but probably accurate formulation of James Kurth, "one could have an Iraq, but without democracy. Alternatively, one could have democracy, but without an Iraq. But one could not have both."<sup>57</sup>

## **Lessons.**

The principal purpose of this monograph has been to cast doubt on the assumption that the United States squandered an historic opportunity to reconstruct the Iraqi state through mind-numbing incompetence. In reviewing the decisions of the Bush administration, to be sure, one can certainly question a good number of them. But if in detail the criticisms make considerable sense, the overall tenor of the argument is very misleading. The basic problems the United States has confronted flowed from the enterprise itself and not primarily from mistakes in execution along the way. "The war itself was the original sin," as one senior diplomat from the region observed. "When you commit a sin as cardinal as that, you are bound to get a lot of things wrong." He illustrated the point, aptly, as follows: "When you enter a one-way street in the wrong direction, no matter which way you turn, you will be entering all the other streets in the wrong way."<sup>58</sup>

This conclusion should not be seen as absolving civilian and military war planners from responsibility for the choices that were made. It does argue, however, for a greater measure of realism

regarding the constraints under which U.S. officials operated, and the sheer difficulty of the problems that were faced. Even if a larger invading force had had an operational plan sensitive to the likelihood that anarchy would follow rapidly from the decapitation of the Iraqi state, it still would have been extremely difficult to prevent most of the large-scale looting and rampant criminality that descended on the country. Even had American forces understood that they were likely to face a growing insurgency after the war, it is doubtful that they could have elaborated an effective strategy for defeating it quickly, if at all. Given the extreme pressures that have been placed on active and reserve forces in maintaining a force of 140,000 troops, retrospective judgments that more forces should have been sent at the beginning and throughout appear unrealistic, as do the oft-heard calls for more international forces from countries that have been keenly looking for a good excuse not to send them to Iraq since the war began. A realistic appreciation of the manifold problems that would arise from the invasion of the country actually pointed to the conclusion that Iraq ought not to have been invaded and “liberated” at all. As Fallows observes, the most prescient warnings that emerged within the bureaucracy over the hazards entailed by the Iraq invasion did come from those who opposed the enterprise. In the nature of things, this made it very difficult for the architects of the invasion to take such warnings seriously.

Operation IRAQI FREEDOM was, in basic respects, a test of the theory that civilians must intervene in the military planning process and force their perspectives down the chain of command.<sup>59</sup> Secretary Rumsfeld did this in the first instance by starting the bidding for the forces committed to the invasion at 75,000 troops and intimating that a smaller number would be entirely adequate. Events have shown that the number was ludicrously small in relation to the tasks given to U.S. forces, and that Army Chief of Staff General Eric Shinseki was right in seeing the need for much larger numbers. On this crucial question, certainly, the record of Iraq war planning does nothing to advance the case for civilian activism. Even if the indictment of Secretary Rumsfeld is accepted, however, the case of the critics is not thereby confirmed. Taken at face value, that case amounts to the proposition that there was a smart and a dumb way of going about

the demolition and reconstruction of the Iraqi state, and that the Bush administration, blinded by ideology, chose the latter course. A more appropriate lesson is that there are certain intrinsic limits to what military power can accomplish that both defenders and critics of the administration's course of action have ignored. "Policy must know the instrument it is to employ," says Clausewitz in one of his enduring formulations. For certain purposes, like the creation of a liberal democratic society that will be a model for others, it seems fair to conclude that military power is a blunt instrument, destined by its very nature to give rise to unintended and unwelcome consequences.<sup>60</sup>

It is notable, indeed, that the argument over "what went wrong" has seldom, if at all, brought into question the tactics employed by U.S. forces, but there was, in fact, a deep contradiction between the democracy the United States said it was trying to build and the methods it employed to battle the insurgency. Democracy, as it is commonly understood, is about more than free and fair elections. It requires "independent courts, equality before the law, and constitutional limits on the powers of government. It establishes independent institutions to control and punish corruption and abuse of power." No one in a democracy "may be arrested, imprisoned, or exiled arbitrarily. No one may be denied freedom without a fair and public hearing by an impartial court."<sup>61</sup> Such restraints, however, had no bearing on the conduct of U.S. military forces, whose actions were governed formally by the law of armed conflict rather than the protection of individual rights typical of constitutional democracies. The U.S. military relied on military intelligence, often defective, rather than judicial warrants to conduct raids and pursue suspects. It arrested and imprisoned many individuals without even a pretense of fair and public hearings by impartial courts and often left family members with no knowledge of the whereabouts of their kin or the charges brought against them. There were few constitutional restraints on U.S. actions, and none reachable by Iraqi authorities. For all the effort that American officials put into enshrining various individual rights in the TAL, the United States was equally insistent that the restraints on governmental power that the TAL incorporated did not apply to the coalition forces that actually held the police and

military power in the country. Even if the plea is accepted that such measures were permitted by the laws of war and justified on grounds of military necessity, the flouting of such requirements by U.S. forces could not but undercut the U.S. case for democracy. Such conduct communicated to Iraqis that, while limitations on the power of the state ought to be enshrined in the constitution, they might easily be brushed aside by the appeal to national security.<sup>62</sup>

However Iraq ends, the lessons drawn from the experience are likely to be very important for the American government. Probably the most likely lesson is that agencies and departments of the U.S. Government and military need to be recast to fight another such war successfully. Some suggest that the United States should beef up its “nation-building” expertise, perhaps creating a cabinet level department charged with “reconstruction and stabilization.” Others argue that the army, having gotten out of the counterinsurgency business after Vietnam, needs to devote far more emphasis to training its forces to conduct those missions. A different conclusion would be to devise a national security strategy in which there is no imperative to fight the kind of war that the United States has fought in Iraq. Rather than “do it better next time,” the contrary lesson would be on the order of “don’t do it at all.” There is, to be sure, a basic virtue in what political scientist Samuel Huntington has called “strategic pluralism.” Since threats are unpredictable, it stands to reason that a wide variety of capabilities, including redundancies in various service arms, is a virtue in national security strategy. Undoubtedly, too, U.S. forces may be called upon again to participate in operations to reconstruct “failed states,” and U.S. forces need to think about how to do this intelligently. But consideration also needs to be given to the counterargument that developing a wide range of capabilities increases the likelihood that they will be used for unnecessary enterprises.

Another lesson would be to insist on more realism in war planning projections. We have seen that politically unrealistic assumptions regarding the potential contribution of allied forces entered strongly into the war planning process during the prelude to the Iraq war, with the diplomacy of war preparation badly out of sync with the assumptions of the military planners. Ironically, OSD’s decision to pare the size of the invasion force, though justly criticized, had the

unforeseen benefit of leaving sufficient reserves in the system to deal with a protracted campaign. Had the United States invaded with the 400,000 forces initially foreseen at the beginning of the military planning process, U.S. forces would have been placed under severe strain, and it is not evident how the challenge would have been met. The severe pressures placed on Army Reserve and National Guard forces by the Iraq campaign—including the odious expedient of the “backdoor draft”—necessitate a rethinking of the entire system for the recruitment and retention of ground forces.<sup>63</sup>

Finally, the military services—including but not limited to the Army—must digest again the lesson that “war is an instrument of policy.” The use of force must be guided by the imperative that it is to serve a political aim. The profound neglect given to reestablishing order in the military’s prewar planning and the facile assumption that operations critical to the overall success of the campaign were “somebody else’s business” reflect a shallow view of warfare. The American war plan, far from being “the most brilliant in modern American military history,” was, in crucial respects, not directed at the main political object: ensuring a successful reconstruction. It did not look toward “the day after” in a way that recognized the most serious problems that would face the United States after the collapse of the Iraqi regime.

This was not simply a failure of “intelligence” but one of “strategic culture”—the tendency, that is, for war planners, both civilian and military, to be “obsessed with stupendous deeds of fire and movement” rather than the political functions that war must serve.<sup>64</sup> That proclivity has many dimensions, from theories of “shock and awe” in the Air Force and OSD to the aversion to policing and peacekeeping functions in the Army. Though the aversion to occupation duties did not and could not survive the encounter with Iraqi realities, the duties were carried out in a fashion—with the imperatives of “force protection” overriding concern for Iraqi civilian casualties—that risked sacrificing the broader strategic mission of U.S. forces.<sup>65</sup> Like other failures of the U.S. mission in Iraq, this, too, has an air of inevitability about it. But civilian and military leaders need to ask themselves whether such a bargain is good for the nation and consistent with the professional ethic that soldiers are obligated to obey.

## ENDNOTES

1. An earlier version of this monograph appeared in *Survival*, Vol. 47, Summer 2005, pp. 7-31.

2. Peter Grier, "The Rising Economic Cost of the Iraq War," *Christian Science Monitor*, May 19, 2005, reports that Congress has approved \$192 billion for the Iraq war and that the Congressional Budget Office has estimated that total costs might rise as high as \$600 billion by 2010. According to a former Pentagon comptroller cited in Grier's report, current operations in Iraq run about \$5 billion a month. Special appropriations only cover incremental costs (such as combat pay) and exclude soldiers' regular pay and other items such as future health care benefits, so there remains considerable room for argument with respect to the "real" costs of the war.

3. Frederick D. Barton and Bathsheba N. Crocker, *Capturing Iraqi Voices*, Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2004. See also from the Brookings Institution the regularly updated "Iraq Index: Tracking Reconstruction and Security in Post-Saddam Iraq," at <http://www.brookings.edu/iraqindex>.

4. Chatham House Briefing Paper, *Iraq in Transition: Vortex or Catalyst*, London: Chatham House, September 2004; Douglas Jehl, "U.S. Intelligence Shows Pessimism on Iraq's Future," *New York Times*, September 16, 2004.

5. "As much as the invasion of Iraq and the rout of Saddam Hussein and his army was a triumph of planning and implementation, the mess that is postwar Iraq is a failure of planning and implementation." David Rieff, "Blueprint for a Mess," *New York Times*, November 2, 2003. "In planning for a war to topple Saddam," notes Niall Ferguson, "Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld did a brilliant job. But in planning for the peace that would follow, he did a dreadful job." "Recovering Our Nerve," *The National Interest*, Vol. 76, Summer 2004, p. 52.

6. James Fallows, "Blind into Baghdad," *The Atlantic Monthly*, January/February 2004, p. 72. See also David L. Phillips, *Losing Iraq: Inside the Postwar Reconstruction Fiasco*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Reinner Publishers, 2005.

7. Richard Lowry, "What Went Wrong? The Miscalculations and Missteps that Led to the Current Situation in Iraq," *National Review*, October 25, 2004, pp. 34-44.

8. Larry Diamond, quoted in Rajiv Chandrasekaran, "Mistakes Loom Large as Handover Nears," *Washington Post*, June 20, 2004. See further Larry Diamond, *Squandered Victory: The American Occupation and the Bungled Effort to Bring Democracy to Iraq*, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005.

9. Larry Diamond, "What Went Wrong in Iraq," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 83, September/October 2004, p. 34.

10. For a suggestive analysis, see Lawrence Freedman, "Rumsfeld's Legacy: The Iraq Syndrome?" *Washington Post*, January 9, 2005. The argument over Iraq also parallels the argument over Vietnam in certain respects. Conservative writers

have been attracted to the proposition that overwhelming strength might have won the war, and that failure was the result of civilian leaders tying the hands of the military. Liberal authors, by contrast, stress the incoherence of the war plans developed by U.S. military leaders and emphasize, for example, the importance of population security. Underlying each of these attitudes are contrary theories about how the world works that show real persistence over time.

11. James Dobbins, quoted in Robin Wright, "Series of U.S. Fumbles Blamed for Turmoil in Postwar Iraq," *Washington Post*, April 11, 2004.

12. See the incisive analysis of these interrelationships in Diamond, "What Went Wrong."

13. George Packer, "War After the War: What Washington Doesn't See in Iraq," *The New Yorker*, November 24, 2003. See also John Lee Anderson, *The Fall of Baghdad*, New York: Penguin, 2004.

14. Quoted in Andrew J. Bacevich, "Balkan Ghosts: Mistakes of the Clinton Team, Mistakes of the Bush Team," *National Review*, April 21, 2003.

15. As of June 10, 2005, according to official figures at <http://icasualties.org/oif/>.

16. For the significance of this key choice—"to win or not to lose"—in a variety of conflicts, see Raymond Aron, *Peace and War: A Theory of International Relations*, Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1966, pp. 30-40.

17. Edward Cody, "In Iraq, Showdown Looms Over Self-Rule for Kurds," *Washington Post*, July 11, 2004. See also George Packer, "The Next Iraqi War: What Kirkuk's Struggle to Reverse Saddam's Ethnic Cleansing Signals for the Future of Iraq," *The New Yorker*, October 4, 2004.

18. On the failures of the Coalition Provisional Authority's (CPA) economic reconstruction plan, especially the lack of progress in overcoming high levels of Iraqi unemployment, see John Doe, "Mismanaging Iraq: The Economics of Insurgency," *The National Interest*, Vol. 78, Winter 2004/05, pp. 108-113. One CPA official noted that the "primary beneficiaries" of the \$18.6 billion granted by Congress "will be American companies" and will employ foreign workers instead of Iraqis. Chandrasekaran, "Mistakes Loom Large as Handover Nears." Irrational as this was from the standpoint of winning the war, such a focus—dictated by domestic political considerations—may also be considered nearly inevitable.

19. Lawrence F. Kaplan, "The Last Casualty," *The New Republic*, February 7, 2005, pp. 17-21. For an especially poignant example, see Elizabeth Rubin, "Fern Holland's War," *New York Times*, September 19, 2004.

20. In testimony before the House Armed Services Committee, General John Keane, who served as Army Vice Chief of Staff during the invasion, remarked of the insurgency that "we didn't see it coming. And we were not properly prepared and organized to deal with it. . . . Many of us got seduced by the Iraqi exiles in terms of what the outcome would be." Keane told the committee, his hands spread wide, "This represents the space for the intellectual capital that we expended to take the regime down." And then drawing two fingers nearly together to reveal

just a small gap, Keane added, "This represents the space for the intellectual capital to deal with it after. I mean, that was the reality of it." Cited in Stephen J. Hedges, "Former General Says U.S. Military Didn't Expect Iraqi Insurgency," *Chicago Tribune*, July 15, 2004.

21. Diamond, "What Went Wrong," pp. 35-36.

22. These conclusions were reached in a military briefing prepared before the war for the UN National Security Council called "Force Security in Seven Recent Stability Operations." See Michael R. Gordon, "'Catastrophic Success': The Strategy to Secure Iraq did not Foresee a 2nd War," *New York Times*, October 19, 2004. On historic force-to-population ratios, see also James Dobbins, *America's Role in Nation-Building: From Germany to Iraq*, Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2003.

23. Fallows, "Blind into Baghdad," p. 64; Gordon, "Catastrophic Success," *New York Times*, October 19, 2004.

24. See Interview with James Perito, "Truth, War, and Consequences," *Frontline*, Public Broadcasting System, October 2003, at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/truth/interviews/perito.html>.

25. Farnaz Fassihi, "For Iraqi Family, A Torturous Search For Detained Kin; Overwhelmed U.S. Military Can't Track Everyone Arrested in Security Raids, Inciting Iraqis' Rage," *Wall Street Journal*, September 16, 2003. See also Robin Wright and Thomas E. Ricks, "Bremer Criticizes Troop Levels: Ex-Overseer of Iraq Says U.S. Effort Was Hampered Early On," *Washington Post*, October 5, 2004. "We never had enough troops on the ground," Bremer noted. "The single most important change—the one thing that would have improved the situation—would have been having more troops in Iraq at the beginning and throughout" the occupation.

26. Michael E. O'Hanlon, "Iraq Without a Plan," *Policy Review*, Vol. 128, December 2004/January 2005.

27. Thomas E. White, then Secretary of the Army, notes that "Our working budgetary assumption was that 90 days after completion of the operation, we would withdraw the first 50,000 and then every 30 days we'd take out another 50,000 until everybody was back. The view was that whatever was left in Iraq would be de minimis." Quoted in Gordon, "Catastrophic Success: The Strategy to Secure Iraq did not Foresee a 2nd War," *New York Times*, October 19, 2004.

28. Nelson, quoted in Matthew Hay Brown and Tamara Lytle, "Questions Mount on Whether Iraq Is Becoming a Quagmire," *Orlando Sentinel*, April 7, 2004. See also Robert E. Hunter, "The Perfect Army for Iraq: NATO," *New York Times*, September 13, 2003.

29. On U.S. justifications for the Iraq war, see especially Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Lindsay, *America Unbound: The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy*, Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2003; and Jeffrey Record, *Dark Victory: America's Second War Against Iraq*, Annapolis, Naval Institute Press, 2004.



30. For the firestorm in allied opinion, see Elizabeth Pond, *Friendly Fire: The Near-Death of the Transatlantic Alliance*, Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2004.

31. See Thalif Deen, "UN Unions Want Workers Out of Iraq," *Inter Press Service*, October 7, 2004.

32. For allied contributions, see especially a regularly updated listing of *GlobalSecurity.org* at [http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/iraq\\_orbat\\_coalition.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/iraq_orbat_coalition.htm).

33. Quoted in John F. Burns, "The Iraqi Capital; Baghdad Residents Begin a Long Climb To an Ordered City," *New York Times*, April 14, 2003.

34. No American official explicitly condoned the looting, which would have violated U.S. responsibilities under the laws of war. Nevertheless, U.S. officials did see the looters as striking at "the symbols of the regime," in Rumsfeld's words, and professed understanding of their "pent-up feelings." Transcript of Pentagon Briefing, *New York Times*, April 11, 2003. Noting the psychological difficulty of acting against looters, one defense official later commented: "It's like sending troops into Warsaw Square to arrest people for being too unruly in 1989." Quoted in Lowry, "What Went Wrong," p. 37.

35. Rieff, "Blueprint for a Mess."

36. Rajiv Chandrasekaran, "Our Heritage is Finished," *Washington Post*, April 13, 2003; Greg Gugliotta, "Pentagon was Told of Risk to Museums," *Washington Post*, April 14, 2003; Fallows, "Blind into Baghdad"; Lowry, "What Went Wrong"; Rieff, "Blueprint."

37. Thomas E. Ricks, "Army Historian Cites Lack of Postwar Plan; Major Calls Effort in Iraq 'Mediocre'," *Washington Post*, December 25, 2004, citing an unpublished study of Major Isaiah Wilson III. See also R. Jeffrey Smith, "Now for Nation Change," *Washington Post*, April 13, 2003, quoting Sandra Mitchell, a veteran of peacekeeping missions in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Macedonia: "What we're seeing is almost an acceptance of the situation—that we're not going to be the cops."

38. As is clearly implied, for instance, by James Fallows, "Blind into Baghdad," pp. 64-65.

39. "As early as January, according to *Newsweek*, the Iraqi secret police issued an order instructing its forces to 'do what's necessary after the fall of the Iraqi leadership to the American-British-Zionist Coalition forces,' and setting out 11 steps, among them, 'looting and burning all the government institutions that belong to our Directorates and other ones,' and sowing chaos in the country by sabotaging power plants and assassinating imams and other public figures." Mark Danner, "Iraq: The New War," *The New York Review of Books*, September 25, 2003; Scott Johnson and Evan Thomas, "Still Fighting Saddam," *Newsweek*, July 21, 2003.

40. Lowry, "What Went Wrong," p. 36, quoting Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Richard Myers, who told the Senate Armed Services Committee in June 2004, that "I would submit we were probably too gracious in our victory in hindsight."

41. The Duelfer report provides evidence that Saddam Hussein expected and planned for some form of insurgency against the coalition. See Douglas Jehl, "Inspector's Report Says Hussein Expected Guerrilla War," *New York Times*, October 7, 2004.

42. Michael E. O'Hanlon, "Iraq without a Plan," *Policy Review*, Vol. 128, 2004/05.

43. While not anticipating an insurgency, U.S. planners did anticipate that Saddam would attempt to destroy the oil fields and otherwise adopt some version of a scorched-earth policy, possibly through the use of WMD. In any event, notes Stephen Biddle, "the Iraqis had neither prepared their infrastructure for destruction on more than a token scale nor were they in the process of doing so, either before the war or during the fighting." Biddle notes a variety of possible explanations for such lack of preparation, "ranging from disobedience by oil field workers to organizational incompetence in the Iraqi military to a lack of intent at the highest levels." See Statement by Stephen Biddle, Committee on Armed Services, U.S. House of Representatives, 1st Session, 108th Congress, October 21, 2003, pp. 6-8.

44. For reports of this practice, see, e.g., "When Deadly Force Bumps into Hearts and Minds," *The Economist*, December 29, 2004; Dan Baum, "Two Soldiers: How the Dead Come Home," *The New Yorker*, August 9, 2004; Patrick Cockburn, "Despair in Iraq Over the Forgotten Victims of U.S. Invasion," *The Independent*, September 9, 2004. See also Sean Rayment, "US Tactics Condemned by British Officers," *The Telegraph*, November 4, 2004, quoting a senior British army official:

My view and the view of the British chain of command is that the Americans' use of violence is not proportionate and is over-responsive to the threat they are facing. They don't see the Iraqi people the way we see them. They view them as untermenschen. They are not concerned about the Iraqi loss of life in the way the British are. Their attitude towards the Iraqis is tragic, it's awful. The U.S. troops view things in very simplistic terms. It seems hard for them to reconcile subtleties between who supports what and who doesn't in Iraq. It's easier for their soldiers to group all Iraqis as the bad guys. As far as they are concerned Iraq is bandit country and everybody is out to kill them.

On the civilian toll in Iraq, see Nancy A. Youssef, "More Iraqi Civilians Killed by U.S. Forces than by Insurgents, Data Shows," *Knight Ridder Newspapers*, September 24, 2004.

45. Jim Krane, Associated Press, "U.S. Faces Complex Insurgency in Iraq," *Duluth News Tribune*, October 4, 2004.

46. Eric Schmitt and Thom Shanker, "Estimates by U.S. See More Rebels With More Funds," *New York Times*, October 22, 2004; Tom Lasseter and Jonathan S.

Landay, "Iraqi Insurgency Growing Larger, More Effective," January 21, 2005, *Knight Ridder*.

47. For one example among many press reports, see Jackie Spinner, "In One Night, Iraqi Turns from Friend to Foe: Man Who Supported U.S. Occupation Calls Americans 'the Devil' After Alleged Raid on House," *Washington Post*, January 23, 2005. A more comprehensive account of this dynamic may be found in Carl Connetta, *Vicious Circle: The Dynamics of Occupation and Resistance in Iraq, Part One. Patterns of Popular Discontent*, Cambridge, MA: Project on Defense Alternatives Research Monograph #10, May 18, 2005.

48. Rajiv Chandrasekaran, "Key General Criticizes April Attack In Fallujah; Abrupt Withdrawal Called Vacillation," *Washington Post*, September 13, 2004.

49. Edward P. Djerejian, et al., *Guiding Principles for U.S. Post-Conflict Policy in Iraq*, New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2003; Conrad C. Crane and W. Andrew Terrill, *Reconstructing Iraq: Insights, Challenges, and Missions for Military Forces in a Post-Conflict Scenario*, Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, February 2003.

50. For a defense of the move, see L. Paul Bremer, "The Right Call," *The Wall Street Journal*, January 12, 2005.

51. Michael R. Gordon, "Debate Linger on Decision to Dissolve the Iraqi Military," *New York Times*, October 21, 2004.

52. For a particularly harsh critique, see Anthony H. Cordesman, "US Policy in Iraq: A 'Realist' Approach to its Challenges and Opportunities," Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, August 6, 2004. See also Bryan Bender, "Report Paints Bleak Picture of Iraqi Forces," *Boston Globe*, January 8, 2005; and Sabrina Tavernise and John F. Burns, "As Iraqi Army Trains, Word in the Field Is It May Take Years," *New York Times*, June 13, 2005.

53. William Booth and Rajiv Chandrasekaran, "Occupation Forces Halt Elections Throughout Iraq," *Washington Post*, June 28, 2003.

54. Quoted in Associated Press, "Bush plans U.N. address," *Daily Herald*, September 23, 2003. As Bush described the anticipated process in 2003: "The U.N. resolution must promote an orderly transfer of sovereignty to what will be a freely elected government, based upon a constitution. . . . The constitution must be written, and there will be free elections, and then sovereignty will occur once the Iraqi people are able to express their opinions." Quoted in "Bush plans personal appeal on Iraq," MSNBC, September 19, 2003. To similar effect, see the comments of Condoleezza Rice: "The French plan, which would somehow try to transfer sovereignty to an unelected group of people, just isn't workable," she said at the White House briefing. "It's a country that needs an orderly process to get to the writing of a constitution . . . followed then by elections and then by the transfer of sovereignty." Quoted in Joseph Curl, "U.S. Says French Plan for Iraq Won't Work," *The Washington Times*, September 23, 2003.

55. Charles Clover, "Clash over 'Kurdish veto' looms in Iraq," *Financial Times*, February 19-20, 2005. The Shia, at Sistani's insistence, were successful in removing

any reference to the new constitution when the UN Security Council gave its imprimatur to the new Allawi government. See Peter W. Galbraith, "Iraq: The Bungled Transition," *New York Review of Books*, September 23, 2004.

56. See, especially, Diamond, *Squandered Victory*, pp. 211-245, for recommendations that pair a more conciliatory strategy toward the Sunni with measures to which many Shia would have taken great umbrage—especially calls to disarm the militias of Moktada al Sadr, SCIRI, and Dawa. Though such a move was strongly favored by some Shia in the south, an attempt to disarm these militias by force would have greatly heightened the probability of widespread Shia insurrections throughout the southern part of Iraq. As Diamond concedes, the United States did not in any case have the requisite number of forces to undertake a showdown with them. Given the limited results of the U.S. campaign against Sadr, the conclusion is irresistible that the wiser course was the political solution recommended by the much-maligned Ahmed Chalabi: "Our real business," as Chalabi noted, "is to persuade everybody that Sadr is better inside than outside and to provide some measure of comfort to the middle class that he is not going to eat them up." Quoted in Dexter Filkins, "Militant Cleric Considers Entry Into Iraqi Politics," *New York Times*, October 3, 2004.

57. James Kurth, "Iraq: Losing the American Way," *The American Conservative*, March 15, 2004, p. 16. See also the suggestive analysis of Amy Chua, *World on Fire: How Exporting Free Market Democracy Breeds Ethnic Hatred and Global Instability*, New York, 2004.

58. This was the reply of a regional diplomat who had been queried on the grand question: "What went wrong?" Quoted in Diamond, *Squandered Victory*, p. 280. Diamond takes a different view in his book, but concedes that "the hardest issue I had to struggle with was my interlocutor's assertion of 'original sin'," p. 281.

59. Cf. Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime*, New York: Free Press, 2002.

60. The civil-military dispute over Iraq carries distinct echoes of the grand argument over Vietnam. Then, the military blamed Robert McNamara for overriding its professional judgment, tying its hands, and preventing it from elaborating a strategy that would have won the war. Alternatives included the unrestricted use of airpower, "isolating the battlefield," and fighting effective counterinsurgency by ensuring population security. Today, military critics point to officious interference by Rumsfeld in matters—e.g., the number of troops required to garrison effectively an occupied country—that fell within the military's professional expertise and whose wrong decision by the Secretary of Defense badly prejudiced the likely success of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. In both cases, it is not difficult to make out a strong indictment of the civilian planners. Also in both cases, however, it is rather more difficult to defend the alternative offered by the military or even, given its divided mind and its reluctance to challenge civilian authority, to have a clear idea of what that alternative was. Rather than demonstrating the superior wisdom of the contending sides in the perennial dispute over the boundaries of

civil-military relations, both episodes are prime illustrations of the limitations of military power and the disutility of force.

61. These passages come from the explanations to Iraqis of the requisites of democratic government given by Larry Diamond when an advisor to the CPA in early 2004, as recounted in Diamond, *Squandered Victory*, pp. 106, 111.

62. Feisal Istrabadi, who was intimately involved with the negotiations over the TAL, recounted the U.S. stance thusly: "The American position was that they did not want any restriction on their movements. And they wanted to make it clear that the Bill of Rights only applied to the Iraqi government. Only the Iraqi government would need an arrest warrant; the multinational force could break down doors." Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 161. See also p. 199.

63. Bradley Graham, "General Says Army Reserve Is Becoming a 'Broken' Force," *The Washington Post*, January 6, 2005.

64. Eliot A. Cohen, "A Time for Humility," *Wall Street Journal*, January 31, 2005. To similar effect, see Frederick W. Kagan, "War and Aftermath," *Policy Review*, Vol. 120, August/September 2003; and Antulio J. Echevarria II, *Toward an American Way of War*, Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2004.

65. On the alienation of Iraqi opinion entailed by U.S. "force protection" tactics, see the citations in note 42 above; Richard C. Paddock, "Killing of Civilians by U.S. Troops Angers Iraqi Government," *Los Angeles Times*, August 7, 2005; Robert F. Worth, "For Some in Iraq's Sunni Minority, A Growing Sense of Alienation," *New York Times*, May 8, 2005; and Tom Lasseter, "In Iraq, Efforts to Catch Militants Fuel Rage, Fear," *Detroit Free Press*, May 24, 2005.